

RAMON LLULL VS. PETRUS ALFONSI: POSTMODERN LIBERALISM AND THE SIX LIBERAL ARTS

GREGORY B. STONE
Louisiana State University

In the history of attempts by late medieval Western intellectuals to Christianize the Semitic world, to argue that Muslims and Jews ought to renounce their doctrines in favor of Christian ones, two figures stand out—both for the magnitude of their influence and for the fact that they exemplify two opposite extremes in thinking the notion of a universal religion. These two figures are Petrus Alfonsi and Ramon Llull.

Alfonsi and Llull were born and brought up in the same general region of the world, and they both witnessed firsthand the violent conflict that is part and parcel of religious and cultural difference. Alfonsi, who was born a Jew, spent his youth in Muslim Spain during an era of increasing intolerance toward Jews and frequent warfare against Christians. Llull was born in Majorca just a few years after rule of that island had been wrested away from Muslims by Christians, and he was in his later life a frequent missionary to Islamic North Africa. Both Alfonsi and Llull, then, were profoundly shaped by the very fact of alterity, by an awareness that the world is a place divided by various beliefs and practices. Both of them, moreover, wanted to change that fact, wanted to heal the world's cultural wounds, wanted to make the world a place marked by religious and cultural unity. Both ended up turning northward, placing their hopes in the powers of northern Europe.¹ Both pronounced the same diagnosis of the world's malady (violence and conflict caused by doctrinal difference), and they both saw the universalization of Christianity—the conversion to Christianity of all non-Christian peoples of the world—as the required cure.

But despite these similarities, Alfonsi and Llull stand worlds apart. This difference is partly a matter of historical chronology: Alfonsi flourished in the early twelfth century, Llull in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth.

¹ Alfonsi served as a scholar for King Henry I of England and eventually in the courts of northern France; Llull's innumerable travels always brought him back for extended stays in Paris, where he would appeal to Phillip IV and to the masters of the Sorbonne for aid in achieving his lifelong dream—the establishment of One World Culture founded on religious unity.

Between them is almost two centuries, an epoch dominated by the great intellectual project known as Scholasticism—a project based on the belief that Aristotelian logic would eventually lead humanity to a knowledge of rational and necessary truth, thereby replacing the variety of diverse doctrines with a single true one. Alfonsi is an enthusiastic early champion of dialectical reasoning, one of those Andalusian scholars whose translations and transmissions from Arabic helped initiate the Age of Logic in the Latin West. Llull, on the other hand, who lived during the waning of Scholasticism, sensed that logic had failed, and indeed Llull attempted to move beyond logic through the invention of what he called his Art (a highly systematic and extraordinarily intricate philosophical instrument, on which I will have occasion to comment below). But the primary difference between Alfonsi and Llull is not a matter of chronology but rather of what we might call “attitude”; it is a matter of their respective positions on the question of tolerance toward others. Whereas Llull’s writings are very often marked by a remarkably open acceptance of different cultures and beliefs, Alfonsi, a convert from Judaism to Christianity, turned into a most formidable enemy of his former religion. It is no exaggeration to say that Alfonsi initiated the modern tradition of anti-Semitism, and one of his chief and most influential works, the *Dialogi contra Iudaeos*, has been deemed “the single most important anti-Jewish text of the Latin Middle Ages.”²

In the essay that follows I will first give a brief account of Alfonsi’s thinking, explaining why, in my view, it necessarily became, despite its best intentions, something pernicious. I will then turn to Llull, whose thinking I will support, in the end suggesting that Llull is to be admired as the propagator of a wonderfully pragmatic way of thinking that we might call, for reasons that I will explain at the end, a “postmodern liberalism.”

Alfonsi’s Logic

A good way to begin to see the essence of Alfonsi’s thinking is to consider his highly idiosyncratic classification of the “liberal arts.” Since at least the sixth century, when Boethius’s pupil Cassiodorus wrote an influential treatise on the *trivium* and the *quadrivium*, the famous “seven liberal arts” were an enduring fixture, the structural foundation of medieval education. This distinction between the *trivium* and the *quadrivium* was a distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic sciences: there were three arts of language

² John Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi and his Medieval Readers* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), p. 11. Chapter 2 of Tolan’s book includes a brief outline of the history of anti-Jewish polemic by Latin writers before Alfonsi.

(grammar, logic, rhetoric) and four arts that dealt with “objective” and extra-linguistic or “mathematical” realities (arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy). This scheme was remarkably enduring and rarely altered throughout the Middle Ages. Even when medievals wished to go beyond the confines of this scheme, the scheme itself remained entirely intact, for one could simply add to the curriculum one’s preferred subjects. For instance, Parisian philosophers in the thirteenth century studied ten subject matters: the seven liberal arts plus the three philosophies (natural, moral, metaphysical).

Petrus Alfonsi attempted a bold assault against this enduring edifice of the seven liberal arts. Alfonsi’s classification of the liberal arts, set forth in his *Epistola ad peripateticos*, is a massive deviation from the traditional scheme. First, there are for Alfonsi only *six* liberal arts. Grammar (the study of languages) is expelled from membership in the liberal arts, cast out as an unworthy non-science:

Inuenimus autem nonnullos ex uobis grammaticae studentes scientie. Que quamuis inter artes VII nequeat computari, cum neque sit argumentalis scientia, nec in omnibus linguis *eadem* sed omnino *diversa*.³

(We have found many of you who study the science of grammar. This cannot be counted among the seven liberal arts, since it is neither *knowledge* [*scientia*] subject to proof nor is it in every language the *same* [*eadem*], but in each one *different* [*diversa*]).

For Alfonsi *scientia*, science or knowledge, can have as its object only that which is *eadem*, always the same, always identical. A science of humanity, for instance, can only study that which is *universal*, one and the same in all times and places, common to all humans. Grammar or language is, Alfonsi thinks, the very epitome of the unscientific, of the non-universal, the very emblem of *diversity*—and indeed it is precisely on account of grammar’s association with diversity that Alfonsi exiles it from the realm of the liberal arts. To pursue grammar, to concern oneself with language, is to delve into domains of difference.

Linguistic diversity, for Alfonsi, stands for the whole notion of cultural diversity, for the whole gamut of social, geographical, political, and doctrinal difference and disagreement. Alfonsi wants humans to aim for the scientific knowledge of Truth, which is Universal and One. Because grammar is merely the variable product of diverse times and places, studying a grammar or a language can only reinforce cultural difference and mutual misunderstanding. Only logic, the language-free rational understanding of realities, of beings

³ Latin text in Tolan, p. 165; English translation in Tolan, p. 173. Appendix I of Tolan’s book is the first-ever printed edition of the *Epistola ad peripateticos*; it is thus not surprising that Alfonsi’s attempt to destroy the *trivium/quadrivium* has been largely if not entirely ignored in modern accounts of the liberal arts in the Middle Ages.

or things as they really are, can resolve the differences between Muslims, Jews, and Christians.

Alfonsi seems to have no inkling of the later medieval distinction, made famous by Dante in his *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, between Latin (the grammatical, universal language of transhistorical permanence) and the vernacular maternal tongues (the ungrammatical diverse languages of historical flux). Rather, Latin is for Alfonsi just another vernacular—no more nor less so than Hebrew, Arabic, Catalan, Provençal, etc. This is no doubt partly due to the fact that Alfonsi was born in a Hebrew and Arabic, not in a Latin, world—and hence Latin could not have appeared to Alfonsi to be the “universal” language that Latins made it out to be. Moreover, since the romance vernacular literary traditions had only just barely commenced in Alfonsi’s day and thus were rather negligible, he was not tempted to make Dante’s distinction between a “grammatical” language (one such as Latin, universal, incorruptible, atemporal, transcendent) and the “ungrammatical” maternal vernaculars. Grammar (Latin), says Dante, “cannot be changed”—unlike the vernaculars, which are always changing and are always marked as originating in a particular locale, a concrete historical time and place. For Dante, grammar (Latin), the opposite of vernaculars, is the antidote to diversity, the rampart raised against the ravages of geographical and historical difference:

They invented it [i.e., grammar], then, out of a fear that, because of the change in language which issues from the will of individuals, we would be able to understand either not at all or at least imperfectly the authoritative ideas and histories of the ancients or of peoples whom the difference of place makes different from us.⁴

Precisely in opposition to Dante, Alfonsi regards grammar as entailing diversity, not universality. For Alfonsi, all grammars are vernaculars.

The word “vernacular” comes from the Latin adjective *vena*, which means “native” or “home-born.” In Alfonsi’s view, to devote oneself to grammar (which in the Middle Ages encompassed all of what we now call the study of “language and literature”) means to narrow the scope of one’s studies, to learn, in a provincial way, only the native beliefs and practices of particular historical peoples. Linguistic difference, says Dante, is instigated by “the will of individuals”: the vernaculars are the vehicles for the achievement of subjective, selfish desires. If Alfonsi exiles grammar from its place among the seven liberal arts, this is because he wants to suggest that language and literature can only teach the provincial “truths,” the partisan beliefs and practices of particular cultural communities.

⁴ Dante Alighieri, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, I, 9; trans. Robert S. Haller in *Literary Criticism of Dante Alighieri* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), p. 15.

From one perspective, Alfonsi's effort to escape provincial ethnocentrism is entirely noble. Like Hegel, he sees authentic philosophizing as that which permits us to move beyond the narrow confines of our inherited beliefs and values. Hegel puts this in terms of the difference between true philosophy and a vision of philosophy as being the sum of various historical perspectives of various cultures, the history of diverse "opinions": "'Opinion' [*Meinung*] means an accidental thought, and we can derive it from *mein* [my]. It is a concept which is mine and therefore not universal."⁵ For Alfonsi as for Hegel, one does not begin to philosophize until one steps out of the realm of the "me" and "mine"—until I set aside *my* thoughts, *my* beliefs, *my* practices, *my* people. When a truth is not universal, when it is diverse among diverse cultures, pertinent for some peoples but not for others, then it is really, Alfonsi and Hegel think, just a thinly-veiled selfish ethnocentrism.

The reverse side of Alfonsi's contempt for grammar is his celebration of logic, which he elevates to the pinnacle of the now *six* liberal arts:

Student etiam complures dialectice que ordine prima omnium artium. Ars quidem sublimis est ac valens. . . . [P]er dialecticam rectum a prauo ac uerum discernitur a falso.⁶

(Many also are studying logic, which is first in order of all the arts. It is indeed a lofty and powerful art. . . . Through logic right is discerned from wrong, and true from false.)

According to a medieval commonplace, logic is the art that *verum docet*, that "teaches the truth." For Alfonsi, this art that gives humans *scientia*, knowledge of truth, is first among the arts and *sublimis*, "dwelling on high"—whereas grammar is a lowly discipline beneath the level of the arts. Clearly the aim of Alfonsi's revision of the classification of the liberal arts is to separate grammar (language) and logic (truth) by the largest possible divide. Traditionally situated side-by-side as full members of the *trivium*, grammar and logic are in Alfonsi's revision situated at the opposite poles of a hierarchy.

This situating of grammar and logic at the very opposite ends of a scale of values is not Alfonsi's only departure from the traditional scheme. For in addition he allows no place whatsoever for rhetoric, a pursuit so lowly that he fails even to mention it. In the place of rhetoric he substitutes "physics," by which he means what we call "medicine." The end result is the total destruction of the *trivium* and the *quadrivium* in favor of a classification that looks something like this:

⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. T.M. Knox and A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 58.

⁶ Tolan, p. 165; trans. [slightly modified], p. 173.

Logic [Truth]

Arithmetic

Geometry

Music

Medicine

Astronomy

Grammar [Language]

There is no longer a *trivium* and *quadrivium*: there is no longer, that is, a distinction *within* the liberal arts between those that are linguistic and those that are not. In its place are two new distinctions: between logic and the rest of the arts (logic is first and highest); and between the six liberal arts and grammar. Two members of the *trivium* (grammar and rhetoric) have been expelled from the liberal arts, while the non- or extra- linguistic status of logic's object (truth) has been emphasized by the placement of logic at the polar opposite of grammar. Only the arts that lead to *scientia*, to knowledge of objective, extra-linguistic realities, are permitted. The essence of Alfonsi's project is the claim that truth has nothing at all to do with language.

Alfonsi's dream is that by rising above languages, the various peoples of the world will rise above their differences, finding a common ground in the Truth that can be known by everyone who exercises logic or reason. Alfonsi is a French Enlightenment-style liberal, a "modern" liberal: strip away from humans all accidents of diversity and you have an identical core, you find the universal sameness of all humans. What constitutes the equality or identity of all humans is the common core of "reason" or "logic," the truth that is acknowledged by all.

This universal agreement brought about through by-passing vernacular grammars in favor of rational logic is just what Alfonsi stages in his *Dialogi contra Iudaeos*. In this, "the single most important anti-Jewish text of the Latin Middle Ages," a character named Peter (meant to represent the post-conversion Christian Petrus Alfonsi) uses logic against a defender of the Talmud, a Jew named Moses (meant to represent Alfonsi's pre-conversion Jewish self). In the end Moses agrees with Peter that, of the three monotheisms, only Christianity is a logical, reasonable, and true doctrine: "Certainly," says Moses to Peter, "God has given you much of His wisdom and has enlightened you with great reason, which I was unable to vanquish. Instead, you refuted my objections with reason."⁷

⁷ The *Dialogi contra Iudaeos* is printed in Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologiae latinae cursus completus*,

Alfonsi's polemic against Judaism is the inaugural moment in the history of modern European anti-Semitism. After Alfonsi, the Latin West's attitude toward Jews was altered in a tragic direction. As John Tolan suggests, until the *Dialogi contra Iudaeos*, the Latin West was everywhere relatively, if precariously, tolerant toward Jews. What Tolan calls "the novelty of Alfonsi's attack on Judaism" consists in the fact that, whereas previously (in the Augustinian tradition of anti-Semitism) Jews were considered only to have been mistaken, after Alfonsi they were considered to have been malicious enemies of Christ: "Alfonsi was the first Latin writer of anti-Jewish polemic to assert that the Jews were guilty of deicide: that is, that they *knew* that Christ was God when they killed him."⁸

Why did Alfonsi, himself a Jew by birth, turn into such an enemy of his own tradition? I believe that Petrus Alfonsi was warped by the very principles of the philosophical project that he so greatly admired. He was warped by his fundamental premise: the dualistic absolute distinction between truth and language.

This dualism, which separates truth (logic) from its expression in language (grammar), is the essence of the Aristotelian rationalism that Alfonsi played no small part in introducing into the Latin West. But if Alfonsi brought something to the West, it is also the case that he picked something up from the West: the whole Latin Patristic tradition that associated the Jews with, above all else, language, letters, and grammar. Indeed the entire Christian exegetical method is founded on this dualism: the Old Testament is truth's expression *in language*, the New Testament is *the truth* expressed; the Old Testament is a "grammar," the New Testament is a "logic."

The Christian Fathers did not credit the Jews with anything other than a purely grammatical understanding of Scripture. The Christian Justinian, for instance, says the following to the Jew Tryphon concerning the books of the Old Testament: "Your books—or perhaps I should say *ours*, because *we* are the ones who understand them; as for you, when you read them you don't really grasp the meaning."⁹ Of course Justin Martyr is not suggesting that Jews cannot read; he would certainly allow that Jews have no problem whatsoever understanding the literal meaning of the *verba ipsa*, of the "words themselves." Jews are perfectly good grammarians. Rather, Justin Martyr is saying that Jews cannot abstract from the grammatical sense of the words on the page to the higher, more general and universal significance of those words. For his part, Alfonsi wholly adopts this Patristic commonplace, saying

vol. 157. This particular passage is in Migne, column 671. The English translation is from Tolan, p. 41.

⁸ Tolan, p. 19.

⁹ Cited in Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: les quatre sens de l'Écriture* (Paris: Editions Montaigne, 1959), p. 329; trans. from French mine.

that Jews read the surface only, literally rather than spiritually.¹⁰

Alfonsi's contempt for Judaism was dictated by his contempt for letters and literature (grammar)—since "Jewish" and "literal" were, for the Latin Fathers, virtually synonymous. One Patristic polemic bears the title *Contra Iudaeos qui sunt secundum litteram Iudaei, non secundum spiritum* ("Against the Jews who are literally, not spiritually, Jews").¹¹ The Jews who are literally Jews are, literally, the Jews—those who, according to the Latin Fathers, read Scripture literally, grammatically. Christians, who are not literally Jews, are said to be "spiritually Jews" because they are thought to read in a way that transcends the literal readings of the Jews who are literally Jews. Christians are the true Jews because when they read they grasp the True; they surpass the literal Jews' mere grammar-school reading which understands nothing but the words themselves.

According to the famous Christian doctrine of the fourfold meaning of Scripture, the "literal" meaning is synonymous with the "historical" meaning. What is *literally* meant in the Old Testament is *history*: "Dicitur historicus quem verba ipsa resignant" ("the 'historical' is what the words themselves reveal").¹² Of the four levels of Scripture's meaning, Jews were, according to Christians, able to grasp only the historical, only what the words themselves literally narrate. Judaism, according to the Latin Fathers, teaches history and nothing more than history.

But the historical, like the vernacular and the grammatical, is a domain of difference and diversity. In learning history, one does not learn universal identity, does not grasp what is always and everywhere *eadem*, the same. According to Alfonsi's premises, Judaism, which he thought could not transcend grammar or history, could not attain the status of *scientia*: it is unable to offer certain knowledge of universal truth, of the Logos that precedes, regulates, and outlasts history. Given his insistence that language and truth are mutually exclusive, and given the Patristic notion that Judaism cannot go farther than "the words themselves" (history), Alfonsi presented himself with almost no choice but to convert to Christianity.

Alfonsi's contempt for Judaism, then, is part and parcel of his contempt for grammar, for the vernacular, for the historical—and it follows logically from his elevation of logic, reason, and science above the level of history. For Alfonsi regards Jewish thinking, even at its highest level, as nothing other than a grammar and a vernacular, a language fit only for those rhetorical aims that do not rise above or beyond the particular historical concerns of a particular people. Thus in the *Dialogi contra Iudaeos*, Peter (the Christian

¹⁰ Migne, column 540.

¹¹ Lubac, p. 329.

¹² Latin verse cited in Lubac, p. 24.

Alfonsi) addresses the following remark to Moses (Alfonsi's former Jewish self): "the words of your doctors [i.e., thinkers] seem to be nothing more than the words of little boys joking in school, or of women gossiping in the streets."¹³ The force of Alfonsi's insult is clear. "Little boys in school" learn grammar; "women gossiping in the streets" use a vernacular: Judaism, thinks Alfonsi, is a vernacular grammar, not a rational logic.

Moreover, Alfonsi is here representing Judaism as an ethnocentrism, an obstacle to the sort of transcendent, non-partisan, universally objective logic that Alfonsi claims to find in Christian thinking. The schoolboys and gossiping women are figures for humans who are wrapped up in their own little worlds, who could care less about the Truth of the Logos that is Universal. And indeed what Alfonsi most singles out in his attack against Judaism are formulations that would seem to privilege one particular historical locale at the expense of others, formulations in which the Jews appear to care above all about their own tradition. He does this by mocking Jewish literalist provincialism wherever he can find it. He chides the writers of the Talmud for using expressions that foster the illusion that God "would appear in one place," [i.e., that God, having a body, would only appear in one location on the globe and not in others at any given time].¹⁴ And Peter explains to Moses that, since the world is round, directions such as East and West are not positive qualities inherent in a place but rather are values relative to each observer. Implied in Alfonsi's polemic is the notion that Christianity's apparently impartial universality, its openness to all peoples, places, and times, means that Christianity transcends the merely grammatical or vernacular status that Alfonsi abhors.

Alfonsi was surely well-intentioned: he wanted a God who spoke no one particular language at the expense of another, a God who spoke no vernacular, who acknowledged no place on earth to be the center, who permitted pride of place to no particular historical community. But Alfonsi ignored that the language of philosophy, the language of universally valid logic, is just another vernacular, just another particular way of talking about the world. For the premise behind the glorification of logic is that grammar is not really real, that history is of lesser value to God than is transhistorical universality. But how do we know that God does not prefer history and grammar?

The irony exemplified by Alfonsi's *Dialogi contra Iudaeos* is that the attempt to escape partisan partiality, to escape grammar or history in the name of logic or "universal reason," leads nowhere but back into ethnocentrism, indeed into what may be the worst ethnocentrism—the one that pretends it

¹³ Tolan, p. 12; Migne, column 567.

¹⁴ Tolan, p. 23; Migne, column 543.

is not one. For it turns out that what is deemed "logical" just is the same as Alfonsi's historical belief (Christianity). Alfonsi's God is partial to Alfonsi's own vernacular grammar. Rather than facing the fact of the contingency (non-necessity, non-universality) of Christian doctrine, Alfonsi pretends that his is the only doctrine that is not contingent, the only grammar that is logical. There is no way for Alfonsi to verify Universal Truth other than to assert that Universal Truth is identical to his historical grammar (Christianity).

The West's tendency to see its own principles as logical or universal ones (as super-grammatical or non-vernacular), and its corollary tendency to see the principles of the non-West as merely accidental or contingent, is part and parcel of the very essence of Christianity. For Christianity is founded on its Alfonsian claim that its discourse is Logical, not historical.

Llull's Art

Let us begin our remarks on Ramon Llull by recalling the adversarial aim and the terrible effect of Alfonsi's attack on Judaism:

The *Dialogi contra Iudaeos* concludes, as do almost all works of medieval religious polemic [emphasis added], with the conversion of the adversary. Moses, in conceding defeat, again invokes reason: "Certainly God has given you much of His wisdom and has enlightened you with great reason, which I was unable to vanquish. Instead, you refuted my objections with reason."

Alfonsi confidently invokes reason as the foundation of Christian theology: through reason the existence of God and the Trinity can be shown. . . . Alfonsi attacks the Talmud and the Koran because, he says, they contain passages which contradict reason and law.

This new emphasis on reason is to prove dangerous to the Jewish communities in Latin Europe; this danger is aggravated by the new attack on the Talmud. While attempts to prove the truths of Christianity *sola ratione* were to dwindle in subsequent centuries, polemicists continued to use *ratio* as a stick with which to beat the infidel. Peter the Venerable took most of his attacks on the Talmud from Alfonsi—as did other twelfth- and thirteenth-century polemicists. Such anti-Talmudic polemics increased through these centuries, reaching their ugly climax in Paris in 1240, when the Bishop ordered the burning of thousands of Hebrew books.¹⁵

It may well be true that "almost all works of medieval religious polemic" end with "the conversion of the adversary." If so, then Llull's reputation as an extraordinary figure in the history of letters is confirmed, for Llull's *Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men* is a great exception to this rule.

For Llull, religious polemic is not "a stick with which to beat the infidel"

¹⁵ Tolan, p. 41.

but rather is first and foremost a pretext, an excuse to converse with others. In the *Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men*—a work written, Llull says, “for entering into union with and getting to know strangers and friends”¹⁶—a character called the Gentile (that is, a pagan, one who does not believe in the One God) follows a path into a clearing in the forest, where he encounters three wise men, a Jew, a Muslim, a Christian. Each of the three takes his turn giving a philosophical account of his religious doctrines. The Gentile, persuaded by their reasonings that the One God exists, announces that henceforth he will worship God. But which of the three monotheisms does the Gentile deem to be more true than the others? A response to this question is forever deferred, as the Gentile, just on the verge of announcing which religion he will choose, is silenced by the three wise men:

But before the three wise men left, the Gentile asked them in astonishment why they did not wait to hear which religion he would choose in preference to the others. The three wise men answered, saying that, in order for each to be free to choose his own religion, they preferred not knowing which religion he would choose. “And all the more so since this is a question we could discuss among ourselves to see, by force of reason and by means of our intellects, which religion it must be that you will choose. And if, in front of us, you state which religion it is that you prefer, then we would not have such a good subject of discussion nor such satisfaction in discovering the truth.”¹⁷

Little does it matter to the wise men that their religions be proven, through *scientia*, to be logically true or rationally necessary. What matters is that each be allowed to go on believing that his religion is right. Though each of the wise men uses “the force of reason,” reason does not appear so forceful that it might lead to the definitive elevation of one religious doctrine above the others. The pragmatic benefits of belief—any belief—take precedence over the necessity for certain or true belief. The question “Which of the three monotheisms is true?” is left unanswered so that the question itself may function as the pretext that brings the three together for such “good discussion.” “Truth” here is an infinitely-deferred goal whose pragmatic benefit is that it brings humans together on common historical ground. But this ground remains *historical*, marked by diversity.

Llull’s writings are distinguished by tolerance for other cultures and by a capacity to see things from another’s perspective. Typical is a moment from the autobiography that Llull dictated to some of his disciples at the Sorbonne near the end of his life, around 1311. There Llull recounts how, having once

¹⁶ *Selected Works of Ramon Llull*, ed. and trans. Anthony Bonner, Vol. I (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), p. 304.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 300-301.

been arrested in Tunisia for publicly proclaiming Christianity's superiority to Islam, and having been sentenced to death, he was saved after a Muslim scholar, with the following counsel, persuaded the Caliph to pardon and release Llull:

No cové a un tal alt príncep e rei com tu est, donar tal jui ne sentència a un qui per exalçar la sua llei, s'és mès en aquest perill, car seguir s'hia que, si un dels nostros anava entre los cristians per convertir-los a la nostra llei, que així mateix lo matarien a tal mort.¹⁸

(It is not fitting for a noble prince and king such as you to execute such a sentence on someone who has put himself in danger in order to champion his religion; for it follows that if one of us went amongst Christians to convert them to our religion, they would in the same fashion put him to death.)

Here Llull represents a Muslim scholar as asking the same question that Llull, a Christian scholar, is always asking: "what if we were in the others' shoes?" Neither Llull nor the Muslim is blind to the fact that to the same extent that "they" always appear to "us" to be in the wrong, just so do "we" always appear in the wrong to "them." Llull's tolerance is grounded in his insight into cultural relativism, into the fact that every community (Llull's own being no exception) regards its own *ethos* as best.

Let us recall that, for Petrus Alfonsi, the conflict generated by such cultural difference can only be avoided through an escape from diversity (an escape from what is *in omnino diversa*, "in each [language] different") that relies on rational logic to guide us to the common ground of universal extra-linguistic truth. Hence Alfonsi chides those who study grammar, which for him entails the study of various languages and traditions. Llull's position on this question is the precise opposite: the philosophers need to improve their curriculum by adding the study of various languages. Thus one of Llull's primary goals in his later life was to promote the establishment of grammar-schools that would teach various vernaculars, including what are sometimes called the "oriental" languages. In his *Liber natalis pueri parvuli Iesu Christi*, written in Paris around Christmas 1310, six ladies (allegorical personages) come together to adore Christ in his manger. Near the end, the six ladies pray to the king of France, Phillipe IV, asking for, among other things, the following:

Quod dominus rex, magnificus atque potens, cum papa et cardinalibus ordinarer, quod Parisius et alibi essent loca et studia, in quibus *diversa lingua* fidelium et infidelium docerentur.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ramón Llull, *Obras literarias*, ed. M. Battlori and M. Caldentey (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1948), p. 65; trans. mine.

¹⁹ *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis XXXII: Raimundi Lulli Opera Latina VII* (Brepols, 1975), p. 70; trans. mine.

(that the magnificent and powerful Lord King with the Pope and cardinals should ordain in Paris and elsewhere the establishment of colleges and schools in which would be taught the various languages [*diversa lingua*] of Christians and non-Christians.)

Llull's aim here is not merely to provide the training-grounds for an army of missionaries who will reform the world's non-believers (if so, why include the study of the languages of Christians?); he is also aiming to reform philosophy. For it is significant that Llull singles out Paris: in the early fourteenth-century discourse of philosophy, "Paris" is virtually synonymous with "the university of Paris," the center of the Scholastic universe (indeed, immediately prior to this passage the six ladies have prayed for Phillipe IV's support in reforming the university by mobilizing against Averroism). What is missing from Paris (from philosophy), in Llull's view, is attention to linguistic diversity, to grammar, to the study of the languages and literatures of various cultures. What is missing from the Faculty of Arts and Sciences is just exactly what Alfonsi had helped to expel: vernaculars. Llull wants to reverse Alfonsianism by moving philosophy *toward* vernaculars, away from logic conceived as a language-free discourse of 'Truth'.²⁰

But if Llull's thinking is, as many have sensed and suggested, marked by its celebration of diversity and its liberal tolerance, how can it be that Llull wholly devoted himself to the *universalization* of his own religion, to the conversion to Christianity of all the world's non-Christians? Is there not an intolerable contradiction between Llull's tolerance for diversity and his fanatical missionary zeal to convert others?

As we shall see, there is a great difference between what Llull means by "universal" and what Alfonsi means by "universal." There is, moreover, a polar opposition between the Lullian and the Alfonsian notions of "logical truth" or "necessary reason." It is Llull's fundamentally pragmatic understanding of such notions that enables him *both* to espouse cultural relativism *and* to champion the universalization of his own culture.

Amongst the several hundred works and treatises that he wrote in Catalan, Latin, and Arabic, Llull's major effort was the invention and the continual refinement and propagation of an extraordinarily systematic philosophical method that he called his Art. It is for this Art, very oftentimes erroneously referred to as Llull's Logic, that Llull became and remained one of the most famous and influential intellectuals of early modern Europe—a fame that lasted at least into the eighteenth century, when Llull is said to have been

²⁰ Llull, an autodidact with no diploma, did indeed try to alter the teaching of philosophy at the university of Paris. Though he was occasionally able to give informal seminars, it appears that he was generally regarded in and around the Sorbonne as something of what we would nowadays call a "crackpot."

the butt of some of Swift's mockery in the Academy of Lagado episode of *Gulliver's Travels*. In that episode Swift writes of a certain scholar who, since everyone knows "how laborious the usual method is of attaining to arts and sciences," invented a "contrivance," the purpose of which was "for improving speculative knowledge." While it is certainly true that Llull's Art is a "contrivance," it is not necessarily the case that its end or aim was "improving speculative knowledge." For that expression suggests that Llull tried to invent a *knowledge-machine*, a practical system of sure-fire procedures that would lead us to *know truth* (it is indeed quite a machine—considered by many to be the most internally-complex philosophical system ever devised—but it is not a *knowledge-machine*). People have thought that Llull's aim was to teach a logic that was even more logical, even more algebraic, even more language-free than was the Aristotelian logic of the Scholastics. They have thought that he tried to invent a foolproof technique—foolproof because it did not use language but rather symbols and notations that would allow people of all cultures equal and easy access to *scientia*, to knowledge of non-linguistic reality.

Such an understanding of Llull's art leads to its being dismissed as a mere technology. It has been called a

logical machine which would constitute the same sort of labour-saving device in a scholastic disputation or medieval university as an adding machine in a modern bank or business office. By properly arranging categories and concepts, subject and predicates in the first place, one could get the *correct answer* to such propositions as might be put.²¹

This dismissal of the Art as a rather lunatic attempt to simplify the pursuit of truth tells one half of the story of the modern reception of Llull's philosophy.

The other half is the story of those who take Llull's Art seriously (*too* seriously, as I shall suggest by the end of this essay). These are modern scholars who rightly insist (though, I think, for the wrong reasons) that Llull's Art is something other than a Logic. Thus Frances Yates, a superb expositor of Llull's system, insists that the Art, in Llull's eyes, is regarded as *more* than a Logic, is instead a kind of Super Logic, more powerful than mere logic—which by Llull's day had been recognized by many as being weak insofar as it was only a science of words (*scientia sermocinalis*) not a science of things or reality itself (*scientia realis*). If Llull regards his Art as "more than a logic," this is, says Yates, because Llull is firmly convinced of its capacity to discover universal truth, to correspond to the objective reality of the universe

²¹ Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. II (New York: Macmillan, 1934), p. 865.

in a manner even greater and more extensive than that afforded by Aristotelian logic:

Treated with the utmost contempt by nineteenth-century scholars like Prantl and Littré, the Lullian Art has been for long relegated to the dust heap of useless speculations. Even a fervent admirer of Lull as a writer, as a mystic, and as a missionary such as the late Allison Peers, skirts round the Art in his biography of the Doctor Illuminatus as a rather unfortunate aberration of an otherwise great man. There are, however, signs today that the Lullian Art is attracting some interest as a possible distant ancestor of modern symbolic logic.

There is no doubt that the Art is, in one of its aspects, a kind of logic, that it promised to solve problems and give answers to questions . . . through the manipulation of the letters on the figures. Littré described the *Ars magna* as, at bottom, nothing but "le syllogisme représenté par des diagrammes." Lull, however, claimed that his Art was more than a logic; it was a way of finding out and "demonstrating" truth in all departments of knowledge.²²

Yates concludes that the *artista*—Llull's name for someone who uses the Art—surpasses the logician because, whereas conclusions drawn by logic may or may not correspond to the truth, the Art on the contrary gives the "true law" —the actual objective reality, the real structure, of the universe: "The logician cannot find out the 'true law' with logic, but the 'artista' is able to do this. . . . Lull believed that he had an Art of Thinking patterned on the logical structure of the universe."²³

In his fine book on Llull's philosophy, *The Spiritual Logic of Ramon Llull*, Mark D. Johnston echoes Yates' view that Llull, an arch-Realist, believed that conclusions drawn from his Art really do correspond to the objective nature of reality:

Llull's logical method assumes a "natural" ontology that is extremely Realist and extremely "essentialist" in an ultra-Avicennian fashion. All beings exist for Llull as the concrete realizations of the universal substantial and accidental essences or natures. . . . For Llull, Logic and indeed all philosophical discourse must reflect the natures of things, and hence he deliberately applies the label "natural" to his own logical programme. Logic is never a *scientia sermocinalis* for Llull. . . . Llull's Logic is always a *scientia realis*, to a degree probably unimaginable for even his most Realist colleagues in the schools.²⁴

Like Yates, Johnston thinks that Llull regards his Art as giving a *scientia realis*, a knowledge that is not merely of words but rather of reality itself. If we

²² Frances A. Yates, *Lull & Bruno: Collected Essays, Volume I* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 11.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 56; p. 58.

²⁴ Mark D. Johnston, *The Spiritual Logic of Ramon Llull* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 4.

accept this view, then we regard Llull as merely extending scholastic rationalism to its most grandiose extreme. Instead I would like to suggest that, while it is certainly true that Llull considered his Art to be something more than and superior to logic, it is not necessarily the case that he considered the *artista* to be someone who has discovered and demonstrated the objective truth of reality itself.

That Llull explicitly saw himself as having surpassed Aristotle is clear throughout his later writings. And the difference between the Llullian Art and Aristotelian Logic is starkly illustrated by one of the remarkable miniatures in an illuminated manuscript known as the *Breviculum seu parvum Electorium*, a compilation of Llull's writings put together shortly after his death by his disciple Thomas le Myésier.²⁵ This miniature represents the armies of three philosophers (Aristotle, Averroes, and Llull himself) who have been called upon to free Truth (who, her place having been usurped by Opinion, is imprisoned in the Tower of Falsehood and Ignorance). Aristotle's army attacks the Tower first but seems to be having limited success, and Aristotle's horse is, in comparison with Llull's, rather small. The army of Averroes is next, but his horse is being restrained, held back from the battle by someone pulling at its reins, as if to say that enlisting Averroism in the attempt to deliver Truth is a bad idea). Bringing up the rear, complete with fanfare and with by far the most formidable troops, is the army of Ramon Llull. Here I am interested only in a small detail, in the names of Aristotle's and Llull's horses. Aristotle is riding on a horse named *Ratiocinatio*; Llull on a horse named *Recta intentio*.

The difference between Aristotelianism and Llullism, between Logic and Art, lies in the difference between reasoning and the right intention, between *ratio* and *intentio*, between rationality and goodwill. I will use the rest of this essay to try to explain what I mean by this.

In the attempt to find Truth, what really counts, according to Llull, is having a *recta intentio*, which we may provisionally translate as "good intention": what matters is the purpose, the aim or *telos*, of one's project. If one's goal, when accomplished, brings into being a state of affairs that is good (satisfying, beneficial, or right for humankind), then one's project will properly be called "finding the Truth." Whereas for the Aristotelian logician Truth is Reason, for the Llullian artist Truth is Intention, purpose, aim, or goal.²⁶ Truth, for Llull, is an *effect* that comes into play in the wake of the accomplishment of an aim.

²⁵ For a tremendously detailed description and for reproductions of these illuminations, see J.N. Hillgarth, *Ramon Lull and Lullism in Fourteenth-Century France* (Oxford University Press, 1971).

²⁶ It may be interesting here to consider that the "central prerequisite for comprehending

I said “provisionally,” because we must deepen our understanding here by recognizing that *intentio* is a key, if not *the* key, term in Llull’s own view of his Art. As Johnston remarks: “Among the spiritual principles of Llull’s thought stands one that is absolutely primary to all others . . . because it defines the status of everything in the world. This is Llull’s doctrine of ‘intention.’”²⁷ Johnston continues by citing Llull’s explanation of *entencio* (“intention”) in the *Doctrina pueril*, a philosophy primer that Llull wrote for his son:

En moviment racional son, fill, dues *entencions*: primera e segona. On, si tu sabs la natura el propictat d estes dues entencions, moltes coses sabries: e si les sabs *ordonar* en ta anima, moltes vertuts aurás. *Primera entencio es la cosa final*.²⁸

(There are two *intentions*, son, in the movement of reasoning [*moviment racional*]: first and second. Hence, if you know the nature and property of these two intentions, you will know many things: and if you know how to *order* them in your mind, you will have many powers. *The first intention / primera entencio is the final cause.*)

To define Llullism, as does the miniature in the *Breviculum seu parvum Electorium*, as the art of *recta intentio*, of right intention, is to define it as the art of knowing which is the *primera entencio*, of knowing which *entencio* comes first. Here in the *Doctrina pueril* Llull clearly spells out that the *recta intentio*, the *primera entencio*, is nothing other than *la cosa final* (“the last thing”)—that is, Aristotle’s “final cause,” the *telos*, end, aim, purpose, goal, conclusion. Llullian reasoning is a movement (*moviment*) in the mind in which the first principle and primary intention is one’s purpose. Reasoning is a movement whose end takes precedence over and determines its beginning.

Like most everything in Llull, this doctrine of *recta intentio* can be used in various ways. Specifically applied to the question of logic or rationality, as it is here in this treatment of the “movement of reason,” the doctrine means something like this: there are two separate moments or extremes in logic (the moment of premises and the moment of conclusions), and you must know how to order (*ordonar*) these two moments: *the last thing comes first*. You must start with what you intend to prove, make sure that your intention is good, and only then, *afterwards*, do you find the logical premises that prove your conclusion. According to the doctrine of *recta intentio*, the Llullian artist must already know the answer before he or she starts the movement of reasoning. The Art is not the art of coming to know true conclusions, but

the early Heidegger is to see that, as he understands it, to be a person is precisely to be an end or a purpose.” Mark Okrent, *Heidegger’s Pragmatism: Understanding, Being, and the Critique of Metaphysics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 29.

²⁷ Johnston, p. 16.

²⁸ *Obres Originals del Illuminat Doctor Mestre Ramon Lull*, vol. I, ed. M. Obrador y Benassar (Palma de Mallorca: Comissió Editora Lulliana, 1906), p. 179; trans. [modified] Johnston, p. 16.

rather it is the art of, proceeding from a good conclusion, coming to invent true reasons.

You must know, Llull tells his son, how to subordinate what is secondary, *segona*. The word *segona*, like our word “second,” is etymologically akin to “consequence” (*secundus* comes from *sequor*, “to follow,” “to come after”). In Aristotelian logic, what comes after, what follows, does so as a consequence of what comes before. The conclusion, the answer, is a consequence of reason itself. The Llullian Art, on the contrary, is the Art of putting the consequence *first* and reason second. You must know, Llull tells his son, that logic follows in the wake of purpose. Whereas for Alfonsian and Aristotelian rationalism, our purpose *is* to become logical and rational creatures, for the Llullian art logic and reason are tools that serve our purpose (which purpose is itself without definition until we, who are *homo homificans* [a phrase that I will explain below], give it one).

Although Aristotle surely gives pride of place, among the four causes, to the final cause, Aristotle would in no way suggest that, in the movement of reasoning, one must put the *telos* before the reasons. Aristotelian logic, which always already implied a sort of Cartesianism, sees itself as doing precisely the opposite: you proceed as if at the outset you know and believe absolutely nothing. The logician knows nothing at the beginning other than logic, the basics, premises, first principles, self-evident truths. Logic is a movement of reasoning by which, starting from such premises, in the end you are able to find out “the correct answer,” to discover Truth, Reality. In his *Arbre de sciència* Llull describes the ordering of the movement of logic succinctly and accurately when he says that the “logician places the maxims [i.e., the reasons, the premises] before the conclusion.”²⁹ The logician, starting with premises, follows the movement of reasoning wherever it necessarily leads, and there, where it necessarily leads, is Truth, something of which you have gained a *scientia* that you did not possess beforehand. This is Alfonsi’s notion of logic: if we teach all the world’s peoples how to proceed logically, they will all eventually come to possess a scientific grasp on Reality, they will all come to know the Truth. Truth, the same as Reason, is a goal in itself—because *scientia* will automatically put an end to historical conflict and cultural strife.

But this placing “the maxims before the conclusion” (which is what one does who claims that our aim is to become logical or rational) is precisely what Llull told his son *not* to do! And the obvious called-for reversal of Llull’s comment about logicians is this: the Llullian *artista* “places the conclusion before the maxims.” Starting with what you intend to achieve, find ways to achieve it. Llull *starts with* the correct answer (*recta intentio*)—which means that the correct answer (Christianity) is without any *a priori* foundation or rational

²⁹ Cited in Johnston, p. 101.

grounding. The answer may be totally unfounded, or you might even say “arbitrary,” “willful,” “subjective.” The Art is secondary, a way to “find” what one has already found: it is a way to lend the appearance of a logical or rational foundation when in fact there is no foundation. The Art is a rhetorical device used to buttress Llull’s pragmatic aims. It appears, then, that Llull practiced Scholasticism as an art-form, a genre, a rhetoric, a way of convincing others that there was a logical foundation for what Llull himself knew to be a vernacular grammar. To understand Llull as a *logician*, then, is to misunderstand him; logic, for Llull, is just a *rhetorical instrument*, merely a means to an end. If Llull’s *Art* seems logical, this is because Llull recognizes that pretending to be logical is a good rhetorical strategy by which to persuade more and more people in the world to share your vocabulary. Thus *logic*, in Llull’s version of the *trivium*, is a *rhetoric at the service of a grammar*.³⁰

It is none other than Llull himself who guides us toward reading Llull in this way. For in his testament to posterity, the autobiography that he dictated to Thomas le Myésier near the end of his life, Llull made sure to include an episode that would reveal his view of the essence of reasoning. Here Llull recounts an exchange between himself and a Muslim philosopher:

“Si ergo credis legem Christi esse ueram, legem uero Machometi falsam consideras, *rationem necessariam*, hoc probantem, adducas.”

Raimundus autem respondit: “*Conueniamus* ambo in aliquo communi; *deinde* *rationem necessariam* tibi dabo.”³¹

(“If you believe the religion of Christ to be true, and consider that of Mohammed to be false, give me a necessary reason to prove it.”)

Ramon answered: “Let us both come together [*Conueniamus*] on some common ground; *afterward* I will give you the necessary reason.”)

Llull here follows exactly his own doctrine of *primera entencio*: first let’s decide what we want to conclude, then let’s find the reason why it must be so.³² Let’s you and I, the Muslim and the Christian, agree on something. Afterwards we can “prove” that whatever it is that we have come to agree on must be founded in “necessary reason.” Let’s come up with a shared view of what

³⁰ In *Being and Time* (I. 5. 34), Heidegger characterizes his project as “the task of liberating grammar from logic.” *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 209.

³¹ *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis XXXIV: Raimundi Lulli Opera Latina VIII* (Brepols, 1980), pp. 297-98; trans. mine. Alternately, one might translate the phrase beginning with *Conueniamus* (as does Bonner, p. 42) as “Let us both agree on a common point”—though I think that the translation I have given above does not stray from either the letter or the spirit of the passage.

³² Put simply, Llull is here making nothing other than the claim of the master sophist: “Tell me something, I’ll prove it must be so.” But for Llull this *moviment* is something to be taken seriously (which makes us consider that perhaps Llullism is, in sum, a kind of reformed or redeemed sophism).

is Real, *then* let's use logic to prove that we are right! Let's share a grammar, let's speak one and the same vernacular, *then* let's prove that our grammar is "rational," that our grammar is a logic.

For Llull, it doesn't much matter *what* the common ground is (Llull could just as well have chosen Islam or Judaism; historical contingency led him to choose Christianity): the common ground is not "necessary" but rather is an arbitrary convention. The starting-point, the first foundation, is conventional, which is why Llull's first word in this exchange is "*Conueniamus*" ("Let's convene, let's make a convention!"). We start with a convention, an arbitrary coming-together; *afterwards* we use "necessary reason" to show that the convention is grounded in "truth." But *truth* is in fact just the name by which we honor whatever convention brings us together, whatever vernacular grammar we happen to share.³³

To understand Llull we must understand that the correct conclusion, the *recta intentio*, the *primera entencio*, the common ground on which we ought to come together, is always nothing less than world-peace. Everything else in Llull secondary and subordinate to that first intention and final cause. Llull's second intention, his secondary goal, is the universalization of religion and language—not a goal in itself but a means to accomplish the primary intention.³⁴ The Art and all of Llull's fictional writings are a third intention, subordinate to the others; they are ways to accomplish the secondary intention, which itself is a way to accomplish the primary intention. If Llull tries to prove by necessary reason that Christianity is true, or if he tries to teach everyone in the world Arabic, his doing so is a strategy by which to achieve the *recta intentio*, world-peace.³⁵ But Llull is not at all deluded into thinking that his Art offers a *scientia realis*.³⁶ So we can say of Llull what has been said of Rorty's neo-pragmatism: "science is a matter not of discovering a

³³ For an elaboration of a similar notion of "truth," see William James, *Pragmatism* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1991 [original publication date 1907]).

³⁴ Universal religion for Llull means simply a doctrine that we would like to have universalized, that we wish the universe would share with us—not a doctrine that is in accord with the Real Logic of the Universe.

³⁵ This notion, that Llull's "logic" is only apparently a logic but is in fact a rhetoric, though it goes against the grain of modern consensus on Llull, has nonetheless certainly been suggested by others. Luca Obertello, for instance, says the following: "Quel che non sempre alcune letture contemporanee hanno tenuto nel debito conto è che queste elaborate e spesso frondose strutture logiche hanno sempre per Lullo una funzione *puramente strumentale*" ["What is not always taken into account by some contemporary readers is that for Llull these elaborate and often ornate logical structures always have a *purely instrumental* function"]. Raimundo Lullo, *Il libro del Natale e Il lamento della Filosofia*, ed. Luca Obertello (Florence: Nardini, 1991), p. 8.

³⁶ I don't wish to call into question the invaluable work of eminent Llull scholars such as Yates and Johnston. I am sure that they are right that, judged purely on its own terms, without regard to the *recta intentio*, the Art is an arch-Realism or a "natural logic." But what if Llull created this whole intricate and amazing edifice as a rhetorical strategy—as a way of achieving, through the appearance of *scientia*, his *primera entencio*?

'true,' 'objective' reality independent of mind and language but rather of acquiring habits of action for coping with reality."³⁷

Llull flourished in an age disillusioned with the Alfonsian optimism concerning the value of reason. So Llull tried the other approach: rather than to celebrate a *universal logic* as the pinnacle of the arts and sciences, he celebrated as such a pinnacle a *universal grammar*. A universal grammar is just a historically contingent, arbitrary and conventional vocabulary, just a vernacular that everyone happens to speak. The aim of Llull's Art, in other words, is to *persuade all of us to speak the same language*, to get us all to be, as we say, "on the same page." Llull aims to do so not because we will then all know the truth, not because we will then all have achieved *scientia*, but rather because we will then all behave *as if* such were the case.

For Llull language or grammar is itself the *end* of our studies: what we are *aiming* for is the universalization of the way we talk. This is stated by a character in Llull's novel *Blaquerna* who promotes a world-wide network of grammar-schools as the best means of achieving what is undoubtedly Llull's lifelong aim, nothing less than world-peace founded on the universalization of a single vocabulary:

a *fi* con en tot lo món no sia mas *un* *lenguatge*, una creença, una fe.³⁸

(to this *end*: that in the whole world there may not be more than *one language*, one belief, one faith.)

This *fi* is the *fi* of "cosa *final*": the *telos* or goal of Llull's mission is the universalization of a grammar. After the universalization of a language (of *any* language, it doesn't matter which – so long as that language is good for us), everything else, including Truth (of which there is no mention here), will follow.

When everyone talks like the peace-loving Llull, then we will be *essentially peaceful* animals. None of us will ever say anything rationally true, except insofar as "truth" is the name we give to the strategies and discourses by which we achieve the universalization of our grammar: when we all say the same things, we will all agree that we all say the truth. Hence Llull liked to give his treatises titles such as *Ars inveniendi veritatem*, which means, on account of an ambiguity of which Llull was especially fond, either *The Art of Finding Truth* or *The Art of Inventing Truth*. Perhaps most precisely, what such a title means to Llull is *The Art of Bringing Truth into Effect*. And such an effect of truth is accomplished through language, through poetic invention. Truth, for Llull, is the effect of fiction.

³⁷ This remark is printed on the back cover of Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth: Philosophical papers Volume 1*, (Cambridge University Press), 1991.

³⁸ Ramon Llull, *Obres essencials*, vol. 1 (Barcelona, 1957), p. 255.

Truth and language are inextricably bound up together, because truth just *is* the name given to language that works, that supports and buttresses the *recta intentio*. This mutual relation of truth and language leads Llull to what is perhaps the most stunning of his formulations, his redefinition of the true essence of the human species. Whereas the whole Aristotelian tradition had defined man as “rational animal,” in his *Ars brevis* Llull says this:

homo est animal homificans³⁹

(man is a manifesting animal)

This *fic* here is the *fic* of *factio*, of making, of fiction, of language, letters, stories (what the Middle Ages called “grammar”). So we may prefer a translation such as this: *Man is an animal that, fictionalizing, makes man*. In Llull’s definition, the language of fiction, grammar, is part of the very truth of the human essence. Hence there can be no possibility of escaping fiction to arrive at the realm of the purely rational truth about humankind. Contrary to Alfonsi, Llull thinks that the stories told by those little boys joking in grammar-school and by those women gossiping in the vernacular streets are inseparably part of our essential truth.

It is clear, from another passage in the *Ars Brevis*, that Llull means his definition of man as *man-ifying* precisely as a rejection of such essentializing definitions as “rational animal”:

Question: Whether a definition such as, “Man is a manifesting animal,” or, “Man is that being whose function is to manifest,” is more revealing than the following one: “Man is a rational, mortal animal.” And one must reply that it is. The reason for this is that manifesting is something only proper to man, whereas rationality and mortality are proper to many things.⁴⁰

In Llull’s alternative formulation of the essence of humankind (“Man is that being whose function is to manifest”), rationality is *not* of the essence yet fiction *is*. Whereas Alfonsi wants to transcend language, Llull makes the language of fiction the very essence of our essence: our function, our aim or *telos*, is to *manifest*: to make ourselves up, to fictionalize human essences, to invent ourselves.

Llull’s idea was that there would be world-peace if and only if we all started to tell the same fictions and to share the same grammar. There are some things about this idea that we late twentieth-century intellectuals no longer like (I shall mention two of those things below). But in its essence, Llull’s thinking is something that we do like, a sort of thinking that Rorty, naming his own doctrine, calls “postmodern liberalism.” The postmodern

³⁹ Bonner, p. 609. Bonner’s translation of *homificans* is “manifesting”; I have changed this to “manifesting” so as to reflect the presence in Llull’s Latin of the *fic* of *factio*.

⁴⁰ Bonner, p. 628.

liberal, like the Llullian artist, is the liberal who doesn't believe that his or her beliefs match the logic of truth or reality, doesn't believe that he or she is privy to a *scientia realis*, doesn't believe that his or her values correspond to the timeless set of values that are demanded by reason—but who nonetheless works to promote those values, who nonetheless gives reasons for them, for no other reason but their pragmatic benefits:

[B]ourgeois liberals who have not yet gone postmodern [are] the ones who are still using the rationalist rhetoric of the Enlightenment to back up their liberal ideas. Those liberals hold on to the Enlightenment notion that there is something called a common human nature, a metaphysical substrate in which things called "rights" are embedded, and that this substrate takes moral precedence over all merely "cultural" superstructures. Preserving this idea produces self-referential paradox as soon as liberals begin to ask themselves whether their belief in such a substrate is itself a cultural bias. Liberals who are both connoisseurs of diversity and Enlightenment rationalists cannot get out of this bind.

[L]iberals should . . . simply drop the distinction between rational judgment and cultural bias . . . The Enlightenment had hoped that philosophy would both justify liberal ideals and specify limits to liberal tolerance by an appeal to transcultural criteria of rationality. But philosophers in the Deweyan tradition no longer attempt this. They tell us that we are going to have to work out the limits case by case, by hunch or by conversational compromise, rather than by reference to stable criteria. So we postmodernist bourgeois liberals no longer tag our central beliefs and desires as "necessary" or "natural" and our peripheral ones as "contingent" or "cultural." This is partly because the anthropologists, novelists and historians have done such a good job of exhibiting the contingency of various putative necessities.⁴¹

Like the postmodern liberal here described by Rorty, Llull does not believe that his belief is dictated by "transcultural criteria of rationality." It is the Alfonsian and Aristotelian logician who believes in rationality's demands, not the Llullian artist. Llull doesn't think that Christianity is, in relation to Islam and Judaism, "more true"—but he nonetheless believes that it would be a good thing to Christianize the world.

Llull's thinking, if it is as I have described it, is not without its major embarrassments. For one thing, Llull is more than a bit naive in seeming not to recognize that there is always conflict and violence *within* a selfsame vernacular—that Catalan-speaking Majorcans might hate Catalan-speaking Majorcans, that Christians might hate Christians, etc. And Llull obviously ignored or turned his back on the possibility of which we dream today—the possibility of a non-violent multicultural diversity. Llull tried to force the universalization of his own vernacular when instead he should have, in our view, let others be. But it appears that he could not imagine that multicul-

⁴¹ Rorty, pp. 207-08.

tural diversity could ever become an instrument of peace, and that is why he was so intent on universalization.

We may wish that Llull had been able to overcome the impulse to universalize his beliefs, that he would have simply been able to say that diversity is not a problem to be solved but rather is itself the solution. But very few intellectuals in Western history, least of all the legion of those who, touting the value of diversity, practice "cultural studies" in today's American universities, can be exonerated from the charge of trying to universalize their beliefs, of dreaming of a day and age when everyone will believe what they believe, when the world will speak one and the same vernacular. Perhaps, then, we can and should forgive Llull for thinking that the world would be a better place if there were more people like him.